

Operation: Coutts Freedom Protest

Written by: Sgt. Robert HARMS #57662

Position/Role: Operations Supervisor for General Duty and Quick Response Team

Date Written: 2022-Feb-04

Watchguard footage: Yes

Notes: Yes.

Pre Incident Information: I was the Operations Supervisor since onset of the protest. My role involved front line supervision of all general duty members. On the day of this occurrence, Hwy 4 was closed and several officers maintained several checkpoints at the hwy closure, along county roads, and in/near the town. A build up of protestors had occurred at Hwy 4 at the intersection of hwy 501 W. This check point was named CP10 during the operation. It was typical to have approx. 15 police cars at CP10 to maintain the highway closure. CP10 fell under the charge of Sgt. Egan HENDERSON during this occurrence. Also noteworthy is that STO was initiating an operation to clear the road blockage in Coutts.

2022-02-01

13:10 hrs – I was preparing my team to provide support to the STO team. This included shifting members to key locations and assigning some to the STO team operation. The STO team was preparing to engage parked trucks and protestors in the town of Coutts near the truck scale for the purpose of opening the hwy.

13:15 hrs – I proceeded to, and positioned myself at the intersection of Hwy 4 and RR155 / Twp 11A also known as CP4. This intersection is approx. 1 km north of Coutts. It is also between Coutts and CP10 and is approx. 100 m south of a railroad crossing. Hwy 4 is a split 4 lane highway at this location. Sgt. HENDERSON, at CP10, advised on the radio that protestors at were becoming active or agitated. Sgt. HENDERSON then advised that protestors told him they were going to breach his roadblock and to step aside (or similar).

13:18 hrs (approx.) – Sgt. HENDERSON, advised that that several protestors had breached his roadblock with various vehicles. Sgt. HENDERSON advised that vehicles were southbound in the northbound lanes. Sgt HENDERSON then advised that his team withdrew from holding the northbound lane to avoid injury and collisions and that approx. 30 to 60 vehicles were southbound towards Coutts in both lanes. Through sporadic radio traffic I learned that vehicles included tractors.

I remained at CP4 as it was a key location to attempt to stop traffic and it was directly north of the STO team which was now deployed. I remained in contact with the Command Post and was directed to hold positions and not attempt further blockage of hiway. Only direction given was to watch the flank of STO which I ensured was adequately covered by assisting members

13:22 hrs (approx.) – Sgt. HENDERSON advised his team was attempting to re-take the highway and deploy blockage.

13:23 hrs (approx.) – Sgt. HENDERSON advised his team was successful and re-secured CP10. He estimated 30 to 60 vehicles were southbound and further indicated some of the vehicle had turned around and returned to CP10.

As I waited for the protestors, I observed northbound traffic on hwy 4; approx 1 pickup and 4 semi trucks; I knew this to be dangerous with oncoming vehicles in wrong lane.

13:33 hrs - I observed several RCMP vehicles (not associated to my team) set up a complete road blockage on hwy 4 directly across from CP4 in the north bound lane. Moments later the protestors encountered the blocked highway. I was shocked to see the convoy was led by 2 fast traveling tractors; they encountered the roadblock and did not slow down on approach. As the lead tractor got near the RCMP vehicles, it cranked hard to the right, entered the median, then returned to the roadway in a southern direction. The lead tractor was driven by an older man, approx. 65 with facial hair. The tractor was green with red rims and large tires (double tires on rear). A second tractor did same as the first. The driver appeared very young; late teens which I found shocking and disappointing. This tractor was green with yellow rims and large tires. The tractors and the following convoy of approx. 60 vehicle continued into Coutts.

Horns were honking throughout this event. All teams were directed to remain on post with no engagement unless directed. Eventually the STO disengaged and left the area.

19:53 hrs – I was leaving the command post and heard Unit SE205 advise that a tractor had entered his checkpoint (CP12) and drove at him in what he described was a threatening manner. The member advised that he had to move his police vehicle as he thought the tractor was going to run into him. He stated the tractor parked and when told to move the tractor driver stated he was not moving several times. The member advised that unexpectedly an ambulance showed up to pass by on the roadway and the tractor driver moved but stated he was coming back with more people. I attended the location and the member reiterated same details. During my response to this incident, other checkpoints were advising that they were being probed in a similar manner including by trucks where the occupants were stating things like you guys are going to get it.

As I was speaking to the member, I could see 2 tractors and a pickup truck approaching from the SE; this was the area which the member said the tractor departed towards and I recognized it was the same area where the Saloon, also known as the protestors headquarters, was located.

I intercepted the small convoy approx. 1 block east of the CP12. 2 persons were in the lead tractor; a female of approx. 16 years old and an older male with facial hair. The tractor was a green tractor with red rims and an odd space between the dual tires on the rear. I recognized the tractor as the lead tractor from the convoy that breached the roadblock earlier in the day. I convinced the driver to exit the tractor, which eventually he did after making it clear I wanted to talk to him. I recognized the tractor driver as the driver whom was driving the tractor during the breach earlier in the day. I further observed that the other tractor was green with yellow rims; I recognized it as the 2nd tractor that breached the roadblock earlier in the day.

In an attempt to diffuse the current situation of several persons probing checkpoints and the recent breach of a roadblock, I entered into a long lecture with the tractor driver. In summary, I demanded that the probing stops now and highlighted the danger of it. While discussing, the driver stated he was

not a criminal and nothing further was going to happen. I took the opportunity to highlight the several criminal offences that the driver was involved in including from breaching the roadblock earlier in the day. Eventually the driver stated he felt ashamed of his actions and stated he was a county councillor. Some time shortly after, he advised he was **Personal Info.**. I advised him that I was shocked and expressed my disappointment. He further advised that the second tractor behind him was his 18-year-old son; I further expressed by shock and disappointment. The female exited the tractor and joined the discussion, as did an unknown protestor on foot. I also spoke to lawful protests and some things they may consider. I demanded they call off the Probing of all checkpoints and demanded they not breach checkpoints going forward. **Pers.** agreed to call off the probing and stated he did not want to be involved in criminal acts. He and the small convoy left the area and returned to the Saloon area.

20:42 hrs - The same vehicles returned as did a man on foot whom stated he was **Persona** and part of the protest group. This time the driver of the following tractor exited and approached me. I immediately recognized him as the young man that was driving the second tractor during the checkpoint breach. I advised him right away that I recognized him and advised that he was not smart enough to cover his face like other protestors. He looked shocked. He advised he told "them" that he did not want to do what he did and will not do it again (or similar). He advised he was 18 years old and I took the opportunity to explain the many offences that he committed today. During discussions, I made it clear that what was done could not be undone and although not arresting now there may be consequences to their actions. **Pers.** told me that his son was **Persona**.

Eventually **Pers.** advised me that he wanted to exit the protest group. He, his son, and the following vehicle left my position. I spoke to **Person** mainly about probing our checkpoints and demanded he call it off to which he agreed. I also highlighted the offences being committed and encouraged compliance.

Shortly afterwards, **Pers.** his son, and the following vehicle attended my point and advised they are done protesting and wanted access to a closed road to exit the town as the town was barricaded. Access and a police escort was provided; the 2 tractors, pickup trucks, and occupants left town.

2022-Feb-02

07:01 hrs – Intel analyst Jonathon LASTON showed me photos of **Personal Info.** on his laptop; I confirmed it was the same **Pers.** I spoke to. LASTON showed me and advised this was a website of, or in relation, to **Personal** a farm **Personal Info.** or similar).

2022-Feb-03

16:30 hrs (approx.) – I was parked approx. 100m south of CP10 watching a massive buildup of protestors. A pickup truck stopped near me and a male exited and walked towards me. I recognized him as **Pers.** He advised that he wanted to stop and tell me that he was officially done protesting and thanked me for the previous discussions and not arrested him. I advised him that he may be arrested in the future to which he understood.

Sgt. Robert HARMS

Operations Supervisor for Protest

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